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**Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, And Making Appropriations Therefor. My name is Sophia Lampe, I live in Cheshire, and I am the Director of Children and Family Services at SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS, a non-profit agency. I am writing in support of increased funding to Connecticut community non-profits, and to the Birth to Three system. At SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS we are currently providing Birth to Three services to over 800 families across 50 towns in Connecticut. I am also the parent of a nine-year-old daughter who has Down syndrome and received Birth to Three from age 4 weeks to 3 years and is currently receiving Special Education in public school.

Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. They are what make Connecticut a great place to live and work. I am here to respectfully **request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits**. Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. Please:

1. Commit to increasing funding by the full \$461 million, or 28%, by Fiscal Year 2026;
2. Appropriate \$128 million (a state net of \$67 million after federal reimbursement) in new funding for community nonprofits in Fiscal Year 2022, a 7% increase;
3. Index increases to inflation, to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.
4. Hold nonprofits financially harmless from the impact of COVID-19.

Furthermore, **I respectfully ask that you please support the proposed \$1 million increase in Birth to Three funding in FY23**. This increase in funding amount reflects anticipation of historic levels of case load growth post pandemic. Right before the COVID-19 PHE began, Birth to Three referrals were at an historic high, and we anticipate that these levels will return and be surpassed as a result of many families foregoing referrals during the PHE. These services meet the needs of families of infants and toddlers with developmental and health-related needs. Increasing funding will allow more children in need to receive these essential services. Every dollar invested in Birth to Three programs saves the State \$12 per year in terms of special education service needs in the future. More than a dollar amount, as a parent, I can testify to the true value of early intervention for families. Birth to Three providers work with families in their most vulnerable time: when they have just learned of their child's disability or delay. **By supporting families at this stage, Birth to Three helps them to become the informed advocates that their child may need for the rest of their lives, thereby setting them up for long term success and self-efficacy.**

Birth to Three providers' commitment to providing high quality services and employing highly qualified personnel is unwavering. Even during an extremely challenging year in which we've adapted to unprecedented demands, we have committed significant resources to meet the needs of families in Connecticut. **The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the impact of inadequate funding for nonprofit services and brought unanticipated and unbudgeted costs and operational challenges for many community nonprofits, including Birth to Three programs**, such as:

- Procuring expensive and hard to find Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies;
- Implementing remote early intervention services seemingly overnight;
- Investing in necessary computers, cybersecurity, online meeting platforms and training for both staff and people receiving services;

- Continuing to commit to providing the highest quality evidence-based and family-centered practices, which requires intensive staff training and fidelity monitoring

Each of these obligations requires resources, both personnel and financial, which we have provided. All this has been done under circumstances where programs are facing immense financial pressure, which strains our ability to maintain staffing, supervision, and technology. In fact, SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS fulfilled a contractual commitment to expand from 30 to 50 towns in CT during this time, even as many financial questions were left unanswered.

These challenges are not diminishing; not for the families and not for the programs that serve them. Programs like ours earnestly strive to give families the high quality services they need and deserve, and to do that, we need your support. **I respectfully request that you show your commitment to Connecticut families by increasing the funding to community non-profits and to the Birth to Three system.**

Thank you for taking time to consider my concerns and hear my input.

Sincerely,

Sophia Lampe  
Director of Children and Family Services  
SARAH Inc. KIDSTEPS